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ABSTRACT

Asserting that the traditional system of higher education is not capable of meeting the ever-increasing demands of a developing country such as India, this paper suggests possible alternative methods of higher education. In addition to in-depth descriptions of the United Kingdom's Open University at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, and the Regional Study Centres of the Open University at Leeds and London, this paper examines the status of distance education in other countries including Pakistan, Canada, China, and India. Recommending that developing countries emulate the work being done by the Open University in the United Kingdom, the article concludes by emphasizing that this non-formal system is flexible and innovative, can provide a powerful socioeconomic alternative to conventional higher education systems, and has immense potential for correcting some of the existing weaknesses of the current university and collegiate patterns. The paper also suggests reforms in the system of correspondence education in the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, in the wider context of strengthening and expanding the open university system at the national as well as the state level in India. (Author/THC)

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DISTANCE LEARNING

From Correspondence Institute to Open University via Distance Education Centre

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by
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PROLOGUE

According to the report of the University Grants Commission for the year 1982-83, as against an enrolment of 21, 68, 107 students in 90 Indian Universities, 9 'deemed' Universities and 4, 158 colleges in the year 1972-73, there were 31, 36, 986 students enrolled in 1982-83 in as many as 120 Universities, 13 'deemed' Universities and 5,012 colleges. In his essay "System of Education in 2000 A.D."[1] Dr. K. Jayaraman has predicted that at the present rate of growth by 2000 A.D. we will have 11,500 colleges and enrolment of nearly one and a half crores as per the following pattern :

Table 1

No. of Colleges		No. of Students	
Arts colleges	8,000	Arts	80,00,000
Professional		Science	40,00,000
colleges	2,400	Commerce	35,00,000
Others	1,200	Medicine	60,000

These are indeed staggering predictions. We are committed to democratization of education and equalization of educational opportunities. But it is also obvious that the traditional system cannot cope with this ever increasing demand and it has become necessary to find effective alternate channels. We cannot simply go on opening new Universities and setting up new colleges. The cost involvement is too high. The socio-economic and institutional factors rule out such indefinite growth in the number of colleges or Universities. Even in the USSR where the objective is to provide equality of opportunity to all and where simultaneously with USA, UK and Germany, the idea of organising education through correspondence first originated in the 19th Century, to be precise, after the 1917 Revolution. It is only the group at the top in the Secondary School entrance examination which is provided place for fulltime education, the next group is admitted to evening courses and the remaining candidates, if they wish to continue studies, are encouraged to take correspondence courses. However, on the basis of the results achieved, transfer from one group to another s possible.

There is yet another dimension to the problem. If under political pressures or other non-academic considerations, we open new colleges without any compunction about their viability, and continue to affiliate them to the existing Universities, we create the problem of 'oversizedness'. Such ill-staffed, ill-equipped and ill-furnished colleges are a drag on the normal functioning of the University in more ways than one. Although no in-depth study appears to have been conducted there is a *a priori* evidence that when the enrolment goes up, per student cost of instruction falls and quality and economy remain in competition. This, however, happens only upto a point (yet undetermined) whereafter the quality suffers.

The problem facing the Rajasthan University is something of this very kind. Its jurisdiction extends over almost the entire State and the number of examinees enrolled is over three lakhs. For more than a decade, its Institute of Correspondence Studies has been offering courses in a number of subjects. Its enrolment has also been steadily increasing. But the pressure for admission to regular courses continues. Every year there is demand for opening new sections; somehow correspondence is seldom looked upon as a perfectly valid route, an equivalent alternative to regular admissions. Perhaps the youth does not want to miss the opportunity of being a 'collegian' in company, rather than sit at home and learn in isolation cut off from the regular stream.

One notices now new categories of clients seeking education : The young who for one reason or the other are not able to join a college or a university; the adults who want to acquire knowledge and also earn a degree, to become professionally trained to discharge responsibilities for which they were not trained either due to curtailment of their studies or having studied courses contrary to their vocation: those who do not want to get uprooted from their environment and

1. K. Jayaraman, "System of Education in 2000 A.D." in *Short Studies in Future Research* (New Delhi : NCST, 1978).

do not want a disruption in their responsibilities at home or in their employment: those who look for facility of higher education at their doorstep. Many from these classes may not fit in with our normal admission criteria and thus their aspirations may not be fulfilled through the traditional system of education. The system, therefore, needs a broader access. The need is partly fulfilled by correspondence study. It is now recognized as an effective and economical alternate channel to the conventional system. Unfortunately here too we have acted in a conservative fashion and the Institutes of Correspondence Courses have more or less confined themselves to offering the same traditional courses as are offered through formal channels.

The UGC had initiated a programme of Continuing Education in 1970 when 21 universities were selected for the programme and later in 1978 launched the National Adult Education Programme whereunder nearly 70 universities and 700 colleges are being assisted. In the revised guidelines under the head 'Approach and Focus' it has been stated that :

> (1) Universities have been largely concerned with two important functions, viz., teaching and research. There is now a growing realisation that the universities though concerned with higher learning have an obligation to get intimately involved in the development of the community. So far these institutions of higher learning have been accessible largely to limited number of people. In India large masses of people are deprived of any tangible benefits of our educational system as such. Consequently, illiteracy, social and cultural deprivations and poverty are on the increase. Thus large Sections of our population are denied the legitimate socio-economic opportunities so essential for the removal of an inequitable social order.
>
> (2) The country which has accepted democracy, socialism and secularism as its national goals to achieve development, cannot afford to restrict knowledge only to a privileged few. Plans to improve the standard of living of all and to narrow inequalities have to look towards a system of education which will achieve the maximum spread of knowledge and skills to the less privileged and under-privileged sections of society. Viewed in this perspective it is imperative that the universities and colleges become sensitive to the learning needs of the community and respond to the same through relevant learning programmes and tools. The relevance of continuing and extension education, which is the third essential function of universities, in addition to teaching and research should be conceived in a more comprehensive manner. It should consist of both basic and continuing adult education relevant to all spheres of life. This will require an inorganic linkage between continuing and adult education on the one side and research on the other.
>
> (3) In order to facilitate such comprehensiveness and integration, it is necessary to bring all aspects of continuing education, adult education population education, extension education etc. under a single umbrella and adopt a uniform nomenclature for the department namely, Department/Centre of Continuing Education and Extension work. This Department/Centre should be represented on the academic bodies of the University and its Director should enjoy the same status and privileges as any other uni-disciplinary subject head.

The integration of these programmes with the Correspondence courses, under the umbrella of "Distance Education Centre" should provide for greater effectivity and efficiency.

It was with this background and in this context that during my recent visit to the UK, I visited the Open University at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes as also the Regional Study Centres of the Open University at Leeds and London. The object of my visit to these places was to study their working so as to obtain information and ideas which could help the University to improve the functioning of its Institute of Correspondence Studies and to consider the setting up of a Centre for Distance Learning in this University. This Centre could later be developed into an Open University.

OPEN UNIVERSITY UK

The Open University in UK is an independent Distance Teaching Institution with headquarters at Milton Keynes (50 miles north of London) and 13 Regional Offices covering the whole of the British Isles. The Open University teaches 1,00,000 students every year. It employs some 2,500 full-time staff and 5,000 part-time tutors and counsellors. The Open University students learn at home and in their own time from subject written book-lets named as course units, recommended text books, radio and television broadcasts and other audio-visual material and home experiment kits for do it yourself experiments. Some face to face tuition is provided by part-time teachers in the nationwide net work of 260 study centres and by full-time and part-time academic staff at annual summer schools. Part-time courses are offered by other Universities also.

SALIENT FEATURES

The salient features of the UK Open University which can be of relevance to us in improving and expanding our Distance Learning Programme are as follows :

(*i*) *Planning* :

The initial planning for setting up of the Open University in UK was spread over five years from 1964 to 1969. Though the Open University was established in July 1969, it was only after a year and a half, in January 1971, that the first courses were started. The time taken to establish the Open University is an indication of the in-depth planning, forethought and study required to ensure that there would be no compromise on academic standards. It was decided from the outset that there was no question of offering to students a make-shift project inferior in quality to other universities. It was recognised from the very beginning that the status of the Open University would be determined by the quality of its teaching. The creation of the Open University was the result of dynamic political leadership and cooperation from eminent academicians, educational administrators and experts. The BBC was invited to participate in the working of the university from the start in view of its long years of experience in educational broacasting.

(*ii*) *Admission Requirements* :

No formal educational qualifications are required for entry into the Open University. Admission is made on "first come first served basis" for adults over 21 years of age. A majority of the students of the Open University belong to the age group of 31 to 40 years. The second largest group of students belong to the age group of 26 to 30 years. The average age is just over 30. The social class and the occupations of the students vary considerably. In 1981, a majority of the undergraduates categorised by their fathers' occupation came from the skilled manual class whereas in regular universities a majority of the students came from the intermediate social class. A large number of teachers and lecturers, housewives and technical personnel register themselves as students in the Open University. The percentage of students with no formal educational qualifications was only 8.6 in 1980. The rest of the students do possess some formal educational qualifications. However, it is significant that not more than a third of them would qualify for admission to coventional Universities on the basis of their qualifications.

(iii) *Course Offerings*

The Open University offers as many as 140 courses which can be broadly categorised under the following three headings :

(a) Undergraduate programme for the Bachelor of Arts degree at general or Honours level

(b) Higher degrees programme for Bachelor Master or Doctor of Philosophy. Research degrees; and

(c) Continuing education programme which include courses for professional and scientific updating. management training and general interest courses for the benefit of the community.

(iv) *Course Duration*

The average time taken by a student to obtain an undergraduate degree is as long as four to five years because he gets less time than a regular student to study his courses. The Open University runs a single semester from February to October every year and a part-time student is required to study for 32 weeks a year for about 13 hours per week. However, the system of granting credits for courses passed during a year serves as an incentive to a student to obtain the remaining credits in future.

(v) *Contact Programme*

The Open University is non-residential because its students are home-based distance learners. However, one week residential summer schools are organised for evary course in hired University premises. The summer schools consist of a large programme of practical and project work with plenty of formal seminars and informal discussions. In adition to these, a number of week-end schools are organised as a part of the University continuing education programme.

(vi) *Course Designing*

The courses of the Open University are academically designed by six faculties, viz., Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Sciences, Technology and Educational Studies. Course material is prepared by teams of academics and other staff, and is, therefore, subject to constructive criticism and intensive re-drafting to ensure a high academic quality. Outside consultants of distinction are frequently invited to assist in this task and eminent academicians from other universities evaluate and assess the course material before its printing. Once produced, both course units and broadcasts are permanently open to scrutiny by the outside world, and are widely used by universities throughout the world. Permanent academic staff posted at University headquarters at Milton Keynes and 13 Regional Centres situated all over the UK are responsible for creating these courses. A total of 3.000 full-time staff and 5,000 part-time tutors and counsellors are involved in making, administering and teaching the 140 courses offered by the Open University.

(vii) *Course Component*

Contrary to the general belief that most of the Open University programmes are broadcast over television and radio, the fact is that about 65 percent of the course component is in the form of printed material consisting of correspondence texts, prescribed books and recommended readings. A full course is likely to consist of 32 texts, each of which is specially written by one academic member of the course team who is specially qualified in that part of the course While the text is being considered in outline it is

also discussed with the Radio and Publishing Division of the Open University so that appropriate illustrations and other art work can be prepared. The printing of lessons is mostly done by outside firms. Each lesson is subject to mutual criticism within the course team as well as evaluation by external experts so as to maintain uniformity and quality. The lessons are constantly revised and updated. The Open University also undertakes writing and editing of some text books.

(viii) *Audio-Visual Components*

Television, radio and cassette constitute about 10 percent of the course component. These include courses, broadcasts on television, radio, audio and video cassettes. BBC has set up a special Production Centre with two television studios at the Open University campus at Milton Keynes with production staff, engineering staff, supporting and servicing staff, and technical facilities to produce these programmes with the cooperation of the university staff. The BBC's staff in fully involved in all discussions pertaining to the presentation of courses on television and radio. The BBC is responsible for producing each year around 250 television programmes and video cassettes and nearly 400 radio programmes/audio cassettes. The agreement between the BBC and the Open University provides for transmission of Open University programmes on the BBC network for upto 36 hours per week on television and upto 15 hours per week on the radio. Since the Open University students work during the day, day time transmission is not practicable. So the television programmes are broadcast on BBC at breakfast time, early evening and late at night. The radio programmes are generally broadcast in early morning and late at night. The Production Centre at Milton Keynes is the largest purpose-built, educational broadcasting audio-visual centre in Europe.

The television and radio programmes are designed to support, enrich, illuminate, demonstrate or otherwise strengthen the learning experience of the course. The Science Faculty has consistenly used television for essential demonstration of the practical work of the courses. Social Science, Education Studies and Technology have used television in the main for case study material. Arts have often exploited the imaginative or dramatic experience. It is known that about two third of students follow each programme and this figure holds good even under the pressure of examination revision.

The Open University has moved into the video age with video cassettes available on loan from Walton Hall to students. The video cassette loan scheme means that students can play the video cassettes in their homes or on the VCR installed in Study Centres around the country. By the middle of 1982, more than 250 cassettes a week were being sent out by the University's Audio Visual Department to meet growing student demands.

Over the last five years there has also been a major shift to the use of audio cassettes. Cassettes are mailed to the students along with other course material; instead of students being given a one-off radio experience they have an audio cassette which they can stop and start, replay several times and which enables them to study in close relationship with texts. The audio cassettes are now mailed by the Open University on 'non-returnable basis' to students.

(ix) *Tuition and Counselling :*

As already stated, the University employs more than 5,000 part-time tutors and counsellors in the regions to maintain personal contact with students. These part-timers are usually employed full time by other universities, polytechnics and institutions of further and higher education. They provide a vital link in the chain between individual students learning at a distance (some time in isolation) and the highly centralised organisation at Walton Hall.

During an undergraduate student's first year with the University he is allocated a tutor-counsellor who acts as a general guide and academic mentor. In his counselling function, the tutor counsellor is responsible for the progress of a group of students, helping them to make effective use of the University's multi-media teaching system. He does this through group meetings and individual interviews at the study Centre and also contact via telephone, letter and the occasional home visit.

In his tuition role, the tutor-counsellor teaches one of the foundation courses by correspondence to the same group of students, commenting on and grading their written assignment sent to him at regular intervals throughout the year. He also conducts tutorials at the study centre every two or three weeks.

After the first year foundation course, the student is allocated to a separate course tutor for each course. These course tutors perform the same tuition role as the tutor counsellors at the foundation level except that face to face tutorials are held less frequently. The students retain the services of the original tutor counsellors who, in a counselling capacity, continue to monitor the progress of the students, academic career with the University. Students on the same course living near each other are also encourged to form 'self-help' groups among themselves.

We were told that the tutor counsellors are extremely competent persons who are paid as highly as £ 12 per hour for their work. Students desiring to seek admission to the Open University are also provided with counselling services through these part-time counsellors to enable them to choose the right courses to study.

(x) *Assignments and Assessment* :

Students are required to do practical work, projects and written work. Science students are mailed home experiments kits to perform practical experiments. Students submit written assignments which are marked and commented on by tutors. A student is expected to submit eight tutor marked assignments in a year and the University policy is to use 75 per cent of these assignments for assessment. Computer-marked assignments are made up of objective questions which ask the students to select answers from given alternatives. There is a system of external assessment of tutor marked assignments so as to ensure uniformity of assessment and maintenance of quality.

At the end of each course, every student has to take a three-hours written examination at one of the local centres during late October/early November. The success rate of Open University students is as high as 70 per cent. A significant number of Open University credits have been accepted for higher degree and postgraduate studies at other institutions of higher education. Most institutions of higher learning and a number of professional bodies recognise the Open University degrees and courses for exemption from their own educational requirements.

(xi) *Finances* :

Like other Universities, the Open University gets most of its funds from annual government grants. However, unlike other universities, it is directly funded by the Department of of Education and Science rather than through the University Grants Committee. The average annual grant of the Open University is about £ 50 million (Rs. seven crores). We were informed that the Open University pays the BBC a sum of approximately £ seven to eight million annually for production and broadcasting of their radio and television programmes.

(xii) *Computer in House-keeping Operations* :

The Open University headquarters at Milton Keynes has massive computerisation to maintain student records and perform other necessary functions.

(xiii) *Diversification of Courses* :

The Open University offers a large number of courses specifically designed to meet industrial and technological demands. In the current year (1984) about 5,000 students are studying one of the courses on computing. There are over seventy other degree level courses which are directly relevant to industry and commerce. A wide range of non-degree courses have been developed to meet direct requirements for professional and vocational updating on subjects such as micro processors, data processing, electronics management, education, agriculture and engineering.

In addition to these courses, several courses on community education have been developed. These last from 8 to 10 weeks. These courses cover subjects like (i) The Handicapped person in the Community, (ii) Caring for older People, (iii) Conflict in the Family, (iv) Primary Health etc. The University offers two diplomas in Reading Development and Educational Management designed for the professional updating of teachers and others in the educational field.

STATUS OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN THE WORLD

There has been world-wide expansion of Distance Teaching in recent years. The number of Distance Teaching Institutions and Projects is proliferating dramatically. In 1984, Distance Teaching is undertaken in more than 80 countries and is employed at all educational levels-from primary to Postgraduate, as well as in continuing education Number of students is reckoned in millions. Autonomous, degree awarding Distance Teaching Universities similar to the Open Universities in UK have been established in over 20 countries.

Distance Teaching Universities exhibit wide variation in their scale, scope, objectives and operation. Some of these universities teach the same curriculum as the conventional universities in their respective countries and require the same entrance qualification as in conventional universities. By contrast other universities have open entry and do not require specific entrance qualifications. Perhaps the most extensive range of courses is that of the Pakistani Allama Iqbal Open University which offers courses in conventional education (e.g. Electrical Wiring, Kitchen, Gardening) through to Postgraduate courses. These universities also vary greatly in size. Athabasca University in Canada has only about 5,000 enrolled students whereas the Chinese Central Broadcasting and Television University has 5,00,000 enrolled students. There is great variety in the use of media and methods. With the exception of the Chinese institution the principal teaching medium in all the Distance Teaching Universities is the printed correspondence text. Extensive use is also made in many of the universities of different combinations of radio, television, audio and video cassette, telephone teaching, home kits and regional tutorial facilities.

The Open University has been formally involved in the planning and early development of several Distance Learning Universities, notably those in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

At present the following countries in Asia boast of Open Universities :—

Table II

Name of the Country	Name of University	Year of Establishment.
Iran	Free University of Iran	1973
Israel	Every Man's University	1974
Pakistan	Allama Iqbal Open University	1974
Thailand	Sukhothi Thammathirat Open University.	1978
China	Central Broadcasting and Television University.	1978
Sri Lanka	Open University of Sri Lanka	1981
Korea	Korea Air and Correspondence University.	1982

In the light of developments in the neighbouring countries in Asia during the last decade, it appears that India is lagging behind in the expansion of Distance Teaching, even though the necessity for non-conventional methods of education was realised as early as in the sixties.

THE INDIAN SCENE :

Distance learning in India is confined mostly to correspondence education so far. This is being done by the establishment of directorates/ institutes of correspondence courses in conventional courses in conventional universities. Though there has been considerable growth in correspondence education only limited progress has been made towards the .target of having at least a third of the total student population involved in correspondence education by 1986. This is evident from the table given below :—

Table III

List of Universities showing enrolment in Higher Education and in Correspondence Courses.

State-wise for 1982-83

S. No.	Name of the State	Total enrolment	Enrolment in CorrespondenceCourses.
1.	Andhra Pradesh	2,43,877	15,849
2.	Bihar	1,92,151	1,567
3.	Himachal Pradesh	16,432	—
4.	Jammu & Kashmir	21,259	722
5.	Karnataka	2,36.494	14,736
6.	Kerala	1,29,423	1,795
7.	Madhya Pradesh	2,34,192	—
8.	Maharashtra	3,69,626	12,577
9.	Orissa	66,868	—
10.	Punjab	1,15,386	11,016
11.	Rajasthan	1,70,242	6,136
12.	Tamil Nadu	2,34,785	18,388
13.	Uttar Pradesh	4,79,034	824
14.	Delhi	81,101	9,822
	Total :	**25,90,870**	**93,432 3.6%**

Lessons are written by the members of the university departments and lecturers from other institutions in addition to the staff of the Institute of Correspondence Courses. Most of the correspondence institutes organize personal contact programmes and a minority have study centres at places other than the headquarters :

> Given the lack of manpower/resources and the problems inevitably faced in providing distance education in India-for example, student dispersal over vast geographical areas and the need to produce materials in more than one language-it is hardly surprising that the teaching materials and student support systems are not always as effective as one might wish (Carr, 1978; Gupta, 1982). For example, the 'lessons' still often resemble text-books or lecture notes; and the personal contact programmes vary in length, with student attendance (estimated at 30%—50%) in most cases being voluntary. Also, Datt (1982) has argued that the system has remained highly urbanised, pointing out that in 1979/80 a network of study centres was established in only 40 towns, in a conutry with 2,910 towns and 550,000 villages.[1]

Largely because of concern to establish its credibility, academic responsiblity for correspondence education has been entrusted to university departments. Thus the correspondence institutes do not have control over the curricula and examinations which remain the same as for regular students. Only some universities have presented a few job-oriented diplomas in areas like Marketing, Journalism, Tourism and Hotel Management Personnel Management and Office Organisation. The vast majority of courses lead to undergraduate degrees with a few universities also offering postgraduate qualifications. Location of correspondence courses in existing universities has meant that they have served largely as an extension of traditional university/college education.

We have made a beginning in the direction of Open Universities patterned on the British system, but modified to suit local conditions. The universities of Mysore, Madurai Kamraj, and SNDT Women's University Bombay offer facilities of higher education to those who have no prior formal academic qualifications and have completed 25/35 years of age. The first 'Open University' outside the frame work of the existing university System is the Andhra Pradesh Open University at Hyderabad. The idea of a National Open University, recommended by a committee appointed under the Chairmanship of Shri G. Parthasarthy, in 1975, and accepted in principle by the Government of India is yet to be imple-

1. Ronald J. Carr, "Correspondence Education in Indian Universities : a Change of Direction ?" *Distance Education*, IV (1983), 188.

mented. The National Open University when established is supposed to act as a coordinating agency in the field of distance education.

In most universities in the country the mode of appointment of the Director of the Institute of Correspondence Studies has not been clearly legislated. As a result most Directors are academics who have been assigned the responsibility of heading these institutes on an ad-boc basis for a short period of time. The supporting administrative and ministerial staff posted in these institutes in not particularly suited to the needs and requirements of their job. They are transferred in routine from other administrative offices to the Institute from time to time, as such they do not have the perspective or aptitude required for administering distance learning programmes. They treat their posting to the Institute as a demotion to a place of work which is second in importance to the offices which deal with the conventional education system. The off-shoot has been that the Institutes of Correspondence Studies do not enjoy a particularly a good reputation for management and efficiency. There is considerable delay in finalisation of annual admissions. The standard and quality of lessons leaves much to be desired and students often complain that even these do not reach them in time. The system of evaluation of students' response-sheets and feedback to students is also far from satisfactory. The teaching staff posted to the Institutes is neither permanent nor full-time and is seconded from the teaching departments of the universities from time to time. They do not seem to have any special interest in distance learning, are not too willing to be posted to the Institute and therefore are largely indifierent to their duties. In some universities in addition to their salary they get pro-rata payment for preparing lessons, evaluating students response sheets, organising summer camps and delivering lectures. Their indifference stems from the prevalent attitude of subordination of this mode of education to the conventional system.

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE STATE OF RAJASTHAN

The stage of development of Distance Education in the State of Rajasthan corresponds more or less to the above description. Out the three conventional universities in the State, two offer courses in correspondence studies. The Institute of Correspondence Studies in the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur was established over 15 years ago in June, 1968 when 313 students were enrolled to the B.Com. course. In 1971 Post-Graduate courses in Political Science and History were also introduced. The strength of enrolled students grew steadily and has reached 11,000 in the the current academic session. (1984-85). The under-Graduate courses were discontinued in 1981-82 on account of the fact that private students were permitted to appear in Under-Graduate examinations of the University. At present the Institute offers courses in six subjects in M.A. and two subjects in M.Com. In adition to this, professional courses in Journalism, Tourism and Hotel Management, Library Seience and Education are also being run by the Institute.

The only other University to offer Corespondence Courses in the State is Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur. Correspondence Courses in this University were introduced in 1980 and at present about 1,000 students are enrolled for courses in B.A., B.Com., Library Science and Law.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this state of affairs it would be premature to think of emulating the excellent work being done by the Open University in UK. It would certainly need a long term strenuous effort. In this regard the following observations/ suggestions may be offered :—

National Level :

1. The Government, semi-Government and non-Government agencies which are funding similar programmes with more or less similar objectives but with different names, should be brought together so that the available resources instead of being spread over so thin, with practically no capacity to make an in-depth impression, could be pooled together for better results. With appropriate planning and adequate funding Distance Education Centres could by the end of the Seventh Plan, take over 35 to 40 percent of the total student pouplation in higher education.

2. There should be two independent bodies dealing with higher education at the national level. One the University Grants Commission for the conventional university system and the other for the non-formal system which should cover under its purview the Oben Universities, Distance Education Centres, Correspondence Institutes, Adult Education Programmes etc. The University Grants Commission like the universities is overburdened with the conventional system. The act of 1956 for the establishment of University Grants Commission was for fhe purpose of coordination and determination of standards in universities when the scope of non-formal system and its inherent potentialities, was hardly visualized or its emergence as an effective, economical and alternative channel for fulfilment of the objective of democratiztion in education was hardly envisaged, This process may also end the search for legitimacy, which these alternative but highly potential modes have so far been seeking within the formal system.

3. This National level Co-ordinating Agency could look after coordination between Distance Education Centres in the country. The agency could also explore possibility of preparing some across-the-country courses.

4. The National Open University and National Level Cordinating Agency should enjoy the same relationship that exists between the Central Universities and the University Grants Commission today.

State Level

1. State Government at the level of the Vice-Chancellor's Coordination Committee or its special sub-committee should seriously debate the question of expanding the scope of correspondence education so that in the first stage we could have Distance Education Centres adequately equipped, staffed and serviced. In the second stage we could have full fledged Open Universities For a reasonably well planned 'Open University' the Seventh Plan (1985-90) should be the preparation time. But the effort has to be serious. time bound and fully financed. An Open University in a State should share the overburden of the existing universities and stem the indiscriminate opening of new colleges and continuous pressure for more seats in the university departments/colleges. This would be possible only when the credibility that this mode of education is equivalent in all respects to the formal system and is in no way inferior is established. Also the products are assured that the future opportunities are as much available to them as to formal graduates/postgraduates and in fact they have more options open because of their diversified curricula.

2. Each State should have a least one Open University. However, it should start only after it has served its probationary period as a Distance Education Centre under a University satisfactorily and in the process acquired enough expertise, competence and technology as would suffice to give it an independent Open University Status.

3. The Stare Government should make adequate provision in the Seventh Plan for strengthening the Institutes of Correspondence Studies over and above the assistance, that may be made available by the University Grants Commissioin. The prevailing notion that these institutes should be self-supporting, as opposed to the conventional system which is funded by a 'Block Grant', ought to be discarded. The net return from this system may be far more economical and effective than through the formal system.

UGC Level

1. The University Grants Commission should appoint separate Expert Committees in the Seventh Plan to assess the requirements of the Institutes of Correspondence Studies all over the country. The Committees should include experts in the field of Distance Education.

2. The University Grants Commission with British Council/UNESCO collaboration should get services of foreign experts for deputation to the universities with Institutes of Correspondence Courses to advise on their future setup.

3. Special research support should be given (i) to promote research on methodology and communication technology which could be indigenously produced and economically used: (ii) to conduct survey for assessment of the social and economic needs of the society and design courses to fulfil their needs.

University Level

1. The sta ffing pattern of the Institutes of Correspondence Studies requires to be changed. A team of eminent and competent academicians, educational administrators and experts should be deputed to the Institutes after being specially selected and trained for the purpose.

Meanwhile, the existing staff of the Institutes should be given training to highlight the importance of the work they are doing, to improve their professional skills and to motivate them.

2. The universities should take advantage of the University Grants Commission scheme of Visiting Professors and invite educationists from UK and other countries who besides being experts in corresponding disciplines are also experts in Distance Education and benefit from their guidance and expertise.

3. The system of Secondment of teachers to the Institutes ought to be done away with and special selection should be made for permanent absorption of teachers in the Institutes. No additional payment should be made for the preparation of lessons, evaluation of respons sheets etc. The teaching staff posted in the Institutes should be given intensive training to equip them to perform their duties more efficiently and promptly.

4. The format, lay-out and presentaion of lessons should be improved to make them more attractive and pleasing to the eye.

5. In order to improve the quality of lessons and maintain standards, external assessment of lessons written by the staff of the Institutes ought to be made by outside subject experts.

6. The timely despatch of lessons should be ensured by improving the general administrative efficiency of the Institutes.

7. Students response sheets must be evaluated, by teachers posted in the Institutes of Correspondence Studies at regular intervals and the results of the evaluation should be taken into account for working out the final results. Students ought to get regular feedback on their performance, so that they are provided with opportunities for mid-course corrections.

8. System of counsellors and tutors should be introduced to supplement the correspondence lessons and to ensure that the students of this system are in no way less knowledgeable than the students of the conventional system.

9. Instead of being like a formal 'one point entry', admission should be made a 'multipoint entry system'. This would ensure that those in the stream could at any point leave to take up employment or engage in home assignments and re-enter when circumstances become favourable, without losing the benefit of credits already earned.

10. The duration for completing a particular course as a degree programme should be flexible.

11. More job-oriented courses could be framed in consultation with expert in the field of technical education.

Efforts may be made to involve the community particularly members of industry, trade and commerce in the scheme for improving the distance learning programme, because as a major beneficiary of the product, they have an important stake in this non-formal but flexible education process which alone can help in keeping persons engaged in different vocations uptodate with the latest developments in their fields of specialization.

12. A modest beginning towards the use of modern visual aids should be made by purchasing VCRs, film projectors, slide projectons, and a few audio-cassette tape recorders to supplement the correspondence education being imparted by the institutes presently.

13. Radio and TV programmes may also be prepared in consultation with experts and after careful planning and fore-thought. If the planning is not adequate and the quality of the programmes is not good enough to attract or hold the attention of the students, permanent damage would be done to the future of the distance learning programme.

14. Modern administrative buildings and hostels to accommodate students who are required to attend summer camps should be constructed in the near future.

15. Adequately staffed Regional Study Centres should be set up at places from where large number of students have enrolled in the Institutes.

16. The Department of Adult and Continuing Education and the Institutes of Correspondence Studies should be merged so as to avoid duplication of work.

17. The Government of India, University Grants Commission and State Governments should be approached to finance the improvement and expansion programme of the Institutes because this appears to be the best way to reduce the pressure on the conventional university system which is on the verge of breaking down under the pressure of numbers.

CONCLUSION

It is this non-formal system which can demolish the conservatism in higher education. The flexibility and innovativeness of this system have not been fully exploited. Importantly, it should not be viewed as a system subordinate to the present formal system. On the other hand because of its obvious potentialities as a powerful, economical alternative to the conventional system, it should be given the same status and independence to evolve its course offerings relevant to the needs of society, in restructuring of courses, vocation-alisation and diversification as is enjoyed by the formal system. Only then will the credibility of the system be established and we will be able to enforce the policy of selective admissions rigidly. The objectives of an Open University found the best expression in the following words of Lord Crowther, the first Chancellor of the Open University in UK :

> We are open, first as to people. Not for us the carefully regulated escalation from one educational level to the next by which the traditional universities establish their criterion for admission....We are open, as to places. This University has no cloisters.... word meaning closed .....We are open as to methods. Every new form of human communication will be examined to see how it can be used to raise and broaden the level of human understanding.....We are open, finally to ideas.....

We have still miles to go to reach this goal, and for this a sincere honest beginning has to be made. The sooner we make it, the earlier shall we arrive. Time is the essence. It is now or never.

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